

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSM-03 IO-13 SSO-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SCCT-01 SAM-01 ACDA-07 MC-02

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 /098 W

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8664

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4639

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR SY LE PLO XF

SUBJ: SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON LEBANON AND
INDIRECTLY COMPLIMENTS USG UNDERSTANDING OF SYRIAN ROLE

1. SUMMARY:

ACCORDING KHADDAM, SYRIA'S PRINCIPAL SATISFACTION WITH
LATEST ARAB LEAGUE CONFERENCE ON LEBANON WAS FACT THAT
ONLY IRAQ AND LIBYA OPPOSED SYRIAN POSITION. KHADDAM
BELIEVES LEFTISTS/PALESTINIANS MAY BENEFIT MILITARILY FROM
WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM SIDON AREA AND HE EQUALLY
CONCERNED ABOUT CONSTRUCTION OF NEW AIRFIELDS IN
SOUTHERN LEBANON WHICH COULD ALSO BE USED FOR ARMS IMPORTS.
HE SEES MIXED PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL PROGRESS. ASSERTED
CHRISTIAN SIDE DEFINITELY READY FOR DIALOGUE BUT THIS OPPOSED

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BY JUMBLATT, ELEMENTS IN FATAH AS WELL AS PFLP AND PDFLP.

HE PAID USG INDIRECT COMPLIMENT ABOUT OUR UNDERSTANDING OF SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. FONMIN KHADDAM IN JULY 15 CONVERSATION EXPRESSED MODIFIED SATISFACTION WITH THE RESULTS OF LATEST ARAB LEAGUE CONFERENCE ON LEBANON. HE WOULD NOT CLAIM THAT CONFERENCE HAD BEEN A PARTICULAR SUCCESS BECAUSE, IN FACT, NO SERIOUS STEPS HAD BEEN TAKEN AT CAIRO. NONETHELESS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF IRAQ AND LIBYA, ALL OTHER COUNTRIES HAD FAVORED THE SYRIAN POSITION. ASKED IF HE PERCEIVED ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE IRAQI AND LIBYAN POSITIONS, KHADDAM ANSWERED THAT THE ONLY DIFFERENCE WAS "IN THE WAY THEY WERE TRYING TO BLACKMAIL THE PALESTINIANS INTO JOINING THEIR SIDE."

3. TO MY OBSERVATION THAT LEFTIST/PALESTINIAN COALITION STOOD TO BENEFIT FROM WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES FROM SIDON AREA AND THEIR CONSEQUENT ACCESS TO THE PORT FOR ARMS TRAFFIC, KHADDAM REPLIED THIS WAS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, HE NOTED, SYRIA WAS ALSO CONCERNED THAT LEFTISTS/PALESTINIANS WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE TWO NEW AIRFIRLDS WHOSE CONSTRUCTION BEING RUSHED IN THE SHOUF AND FURTHER TO THE SOUTH BETWEEN SIDON AND TYRE.

4. KHADDAM OBSERVED THERE WERE PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE BUT THAT THE PRESENT SCENE WAS CONFUSED. WITHIN EACH OF THE THREE PARTIES PRINCIPALLY CONCERNED IN LEBANON--PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE AND ARAB/INTERNATIONAL-- THERE WERE ELEMENTS WHICH WANTED SERIOUSLY TO WORK OUT A SOLUTION. SITUATION WAS DIFFICULT BUT SYRIA WOULD CONTINUE TO WORK TO END THE FIGHTING. HE THEN BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE PROSPECTIVE VISIT BY ARAFAT (DAMASCUS 4635) AND DEPRECATED ITS IMPORTANCE. (COMMENT: THIS VISIT WAS CANCELED AT THE LAST MINUTE ACCORDING TO RADIO MONTE CARLO JULY 16 BECAUSE JUMBLATT DISAGREED WITH ARAFAT ABOUT HIS MAKING THE VISIT AND ARAFAT WAS ANXIOUS NOT TO SPLIT PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST RANKS.)

5. IN ADDITION TO ASSERTING THAT THE PLO MUST IMPLEMENT THE CAIRO ACCORD REGULATING ITS RELATIONS WITH GOL,
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KHADDAM EMPHASIZED THAT NO ONE SHOULD FORGET SYRIA ALSO FEELS STRONGLY THAT POLITICAL REFORMS MUST TAKE PLACE WITHIN LEBANON. ASKED IF HE BELIEVED THE CHRISTIAN SIDE WAS NOW READY FOR A DIALOGUE, KHADDAM ANSWERED EMPHATICALLY IN THE AFFIRMATIVE. THOSE OPPOSED TO DIALOGUE WERE ELEMENTS IN FATAH AND THE FORCES LED BY HABBASH AND HAWATMEH (PFLP-PDFLP). JUMBLATT AND HIS FOLLOWERS ALSO WANT TO SEE THE CRISIS CONTINUE AND ARE MANEUVERING

IN THE EXPECTATION OF ATTRACTING AID AND VOLUNTEERS, EVEN FROM NON-ARAB COUNTRIES. IN A SIDE COMMENT WHICH HE MAY HAVE INTENDED AS A JOKE, KHADDAM SAID THAT THE FATAH FACTION NOW GUARDING THE AMERICAN EMBASSY FAVORED DIALOGUE. (HE THEN ASKED HOW MUCH THE USG WAS PAYING FATAH AND THE LEBANESE ARAB ARMY FOR PROTECTION. REPLIED I DOUBTED WE WERE PAYING ANYTHING. MY ASSUMPTION WAS THAT FATAH FELT IN OFFERING THIS PROTECTION IT STOOD TO GAIN PRESTIGE BY DEMONSTRATING ITS CAPACITY TO ACT RESPONSIBLY. KHADDAM SCOFFED AND SAID THAT GUARDING THE SOVIET EMBASSY NOT THE U.S. EMBASSY WAS WHAT WOULD GIVE FATAH PRESTIGE.)

6. SYRIAN PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS:

I COMMENTED IT SEEMED THAT SYRIA WAS MAKING AN UNUSUAL EFFORT TO EXPLAIN ITS POLICY TOWARDS LEBANON AND THE PALESTINIANS IN SENDING BAATHI LEADERS THROUGHOUT EUROPE AND THE ARAB WORLD. THERE WAS HIS OWN TRIP TO MOSCOW AS WELL. SAID I WAS FEELING A BIT NEGLECTED SINCE NO ONE HAD OFFERED TO SEND A MISSION TO WASHINGTON. HE REPLIED IN SERIOUS VEIN, "WE HAVE SENT THESE MISSIONS ONLY TO COUNTRIES THAT DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO ." INIMITABLY, HE QUICKLY ADDED, "FURTHERMORE, YOU DON'T TRY TO TELL THE COOK HOW TO PREPARE A MEAL*" I SAID IF HE HAD THE AMERICAN "COOK" IN MIND WITH HIS CRACK, I WAS SURE HE REALIZED WE WERE INTERESTED ONLY IN THE MOST RAPID POSSIBLE END TO THE LEBANESE TRAGEDY SO THAT WE COULD ALL GET ON WITH DEALING WITH THE BASIC PROBLEMS OF THE AREA. HE ACCEPTED THIS IN GOOD HUMOR.

7. COMMENT:

WE CAN READ KHADDAM'S COMMENT ABOUT OUR UNDERSTANDING
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OF SYRIAN POLICY IN LEBANON AS CONSTITUTING THE CLOSEST
THING TO A COMPLIMENT HE IS EVER LIKELY TO MAKE US.
MURPHY

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